

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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APRIL 9TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

A resolution falsely attributed to the 1941 Committee, of which Mr. J. B. Priestley is the Chairman, has received publicity in the press. In actual fact, while it was submitted to the Committee, it was decided to take no action regarding it. Since it raises, however onesidedly, an issue of public interest I will quote it:

"The Committee welcomes the belated realisation by the Christian Churches of the profound revolutionary quality of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, but in view of the fact that it has taken the various Christian ecclesiastical organisations nineteen centuries to make that discovery, the Committee protests strongly against the proposal to hand back education to their sluggish or insincere control. The Committee calls for a vigorous revision and expansion of education throughout the world upon modern lines, unencumbered by Christian, Shinto, Jewish or other priestly assumptions."

The issue raised is important because there is now an opportunity in this country, such as we have not had for many years, of a new advance in the religious education of the youth of the nation. But the opportunity may easily be lost, unless there is a scrutiny of motives, a clear idea of what is aimed at and a right understanding of the practical problems. Certain discriminations must be clearly in our minds.

(1) However strongly we may disagree with the resolution, it expresses a fear in the minds of many people which must be frankly faced. There is no use shutting our eyes to the fact that the attitude of the Church of England in the past has bred in a large number of minds a suspicion that behind the religious demand there lurk unavowed, and, to a large extent, unconscious, sectional and social interests. Elementary teachers who favour religious instruction want at the same time to be assured that it will not lead to a return to a thraldom from which they have escaped by their own organised efforts. There is also in many quarters a suspicion that the demand for the teaching of Christianity, on the ground that it is the basis of our civilisation, is confused in the minds of a good many people with the quite different idea that it is the basis and bulwark of the existing social order. If Christian teaching is identified with the maintenance of the *status quo* the opposition of those who are dissatisfied with things as they are must be expected.

(2) The two terms "religious instruction" and "religious education" are so constantly used as though they were interchangeable that it is necessary to insist once more that they are by no means the same. Christianity has played so large a part in shaping our civilisation and national history, that a strong case can be made for teaching Scripture in its historical, objective meaning in the national schools; and there are good grounds for the assertion in the Spens report on secondary education, that no boy or girl is fully educated who is not made aware of the existence of a religious interpretation of life.

(3) But when this has been said, the problem remains that teaching is an interpretation of experience and has a meaning only in relation to experience. This is strikingly brought out in another connection in a little volume which has just appeared by Sir Richard Livingstone. It is called *The Future of Education*¹ and is a powerful plea for an extension of adult education, on the ground that many subjects can be profitably studied only when life has provided experience of the matters to which they relate. All effective instruction is a commentary on experience.

¹ Cambridge Press. 2s. 6d.

What, then, are the experiences to which religious instruction can be related? Something may be done in the activities and relations of the school itself to provide the experiences in relation to which religious teaching has a living meaning. But the larger part of the experience on which religious teaching aims to provide a commentary is gained outside the school. If that experience contradicts the religious teaching, the latter becomes meaningless or irrelevant to life. We cannot honestly face the question of religious instruction without being driven back on the need in education of an underlying philosophy of life.

It has been a chief weakness of education in recent times that it has tended to consist in the teaching of a variety of separate subjects and skills without any unifying principle. The Nazis and Communists have swept all this away and gone to the opposite extreme of making the indoctrination of the rising generation with a particular view of life the primary purpose of the school. What should be our aim in our own national education? It can hardly be expected that the full Christian interpretation of life can be made the basis of national education in a society in which profound disagreements exist regarding the ultimate meaning of life and human destiny. There is a deep cleavage between those who look on Christianity as a revolutionary movement of secular reform and those who regard it as committed to the still more revolutionary doctrine that the true setting and framework of human life is not simply this earthly sphere but a larger and greater destiny, and that just for that reason the dignity and worth of all men must be given proper recognition in society. But without some common sense of direction, society must drift to disaster or break up through internal tensions, and there is nothing more important in education than that we should wake up to the fact that it must be based on some commonly accepted social philosophy. Is it too much to hope that a wide and substantial measure of agreement can ultimately be obtained for an educational philosophy which would draw its inspiration from the Christian faith, interpreted as containing a doctrine of man which provides adequate grounds for social action? To assist in the growth of such a philosophy is a task that has no less a claim on Christian thought and energy than that of securing religious instruction in the schools.

(4) There must be on the part of advocates of religious instruction a full understanding and mastery of the *technical* problems engaging the minds of modern educators, e.g. those of religious psychology, the part played by instruction in stimulating and maintaining the religious life, and the tendency of the conception of the curriculum as separate subjects to give place to a more unitary view in which it finds a centre in the person and wisdom of the teacher.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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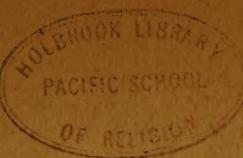
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APRIL 9TH 1941

MATURE AND IMMATURE FAITH

By Professor H. H. FARMER (Westminster College, Cambridge)

In a recent number of one of the religious journals it was said that "Wars come not through the manliness of men, but through their childishness. The war-makers are not properly grown up." The reader was then invited, on the basis of this judgment, to "preserve a mood of sheer disdain towards the undeveloped louts" who lead Germany, and to regard the war generally as a "fight of grown-up people . . . against an insurrection of destructive schoolboys."

WHAT IS MATURITY?

The thought could hardly fail to present itself that such an unqualified projection of error into the other man might well be itself a manifestation of immaturity; but that perhaps would not be fair to an article whose main point lay elsewhere. Still, the question to what extent we are ourselves really mature is obviously more important than the question to what extent our enemies are not, and it is as difficult as it is important. For behind it lies the exceedingly difficult question, what is maturity? And behind that again is the even more difficult question how, even if we have some idea of what maturity is, we may have it and keep it in such a time as this.

These questions are particularly difficult and important in relation to religious faith, and it is on this aspect of the matter that this Supplement seeks to offer some thoughts.

If we define maturity of mind as capacity to think objectively, to face and examine facts, however unpleasant, without the distortion of fear or desire, we are certainly saying something unexceptionable and not without value as a reminder of, and challenge to, one of our major weaknesses. It is a mark of the maturing mind that, to use the jargon of the psychologists, it is learning more and more to substitute the "reality-principle" for the "pleasure-principle." But such a definition does not really carry us very far. For the question still remains how

we may know what is real and true, and what is unreal and false; and in particular what is the relation of feeling and desire to such knowledge. The description of maturity just given may indeed be misleading. For in its setting of "objectivity" in a kind of opposition to feeling and desire, it overlooks the fact that there are spheres of reality in the knowledge of which feeling and desire must play an indispensable part. In such spheres maturity will be measured not by the degree in which feeling and desire are suspended and a coldly intellectual impartiality rules, but by the degree in which feeling and desire are pure and given their rightful place. Indeed the idea of a coldly intellectual impartiality in such spheres is a figment. As Oman has said, here absence of bias is itself bias.

HAVE WE A MATURE FAITH?

Here especially is the crux for religious faith. Religion and deep feeling, faith and the ultimate despairs and hopes of the human heart, are indissolubly bound up together. The extreme plausibility of the view that all religion is fantasy, an elaborate process of whistling to keep up one's courage in the dark, is some indication of the difficulty we are in. Just at what point does the faith which can remove mountains become a childish refusal to face facts? What is the difference between fantasy and faith, between the confidence which releases and reinforces strength, and the self-conceit which in the end undermines it. If we define maturity in this sphere, as we well may, as the progressive substitution of mature faith for immature fantasy, we are still left with the problem how to distinguish between the two, and how the substitution is to be accomplished. The matter is of capital importance for this country at this time. That there can be no worthwhile future for this land without a renewal of religious faith

is an axiom with the Christian News-Letter, but what are the chances, when feelings are being so deeply stirred, of a really mature faith arising in our midst, and not an immature, specious and swiftly passing substitute for it? What signs are there of really mature faith even amongst the religious people in our churches?

The problem, along with misgivings, has been raised for us afresh by the question of sustaining national morale, and by some of the efforts of the Ministry of Information in relation thereto. The continuous bandying about of the word "defeatism" without the least concern to define its meaning is also ominous. Yet to throw stones at the Ministry of Information would show just as great a failure to realise the delicacy and difficulty of the problem as to accept all its suggestions and pronouncements without criticism or question.

THE MEANING OF MORALE

What is morale, and what its proper source? Different people, no doubt, would answer the question differently according to their habit of mind or speech. Some would define morale simply as confidence in ourselves; others would wish to speak of confidence in our cause; others again of confidence in God. But in practice, we suspect, and this is the source of our misgiving, there might be little difference between them. Certainly the Ministry of Information, forced to deal with people in the mass, could hardly be expected to bother about the subtle, but highly important, difference and interrelation between confidence in ourselves, confidence in our cause, and confidence in God. For it, *any* talk about our cause, or about God, which seems likely even momentarily to depress the Britisher's confidence in *himself* must be defeatist and undesirable. Questions of truth or maturity of mind are not a primary consideration. Let there be no suggestion, then, not even in our churches and from the lips of our ministers, that our record is not altogether clean, that we need desperately to ask God for forgiveness, that we are not *vis-à-vis* our enemies a wholly superior people. It is possible that our mentors are right in this. They must, I repeat, take us in the mass and as we are.

But the question remains where in all this is anything worthy to be called a mature faith or one that is growing to be such. And what jeopardy we are in, if such faith is not to be found in the pews of our churches!

How then may we keep fantasy in check and so at least grow towards a fine maturity of faith even amidst the perturbations of feeling and desire in a time of war?

GOD-CENTREDNESS

The first thing that might occur to us to say is that the movement from immature fantasy towards a mature faith is always a movement from egocentricity or self-centredness towards theocentricity or God-centredness. This would accord with the findings of psychology which discovers the main source of fantasy in the dominance of the "beloved ego." But, once again, a mere definition does not help us much, for the disguises of the "beloved ego" are many and subtle, and the problem is how to know when the movement towards maturity is taking place and how to bring it about. We have not escaped the dominance of the ego, we have not grown more mature, merely because instead of speaking of self we speak of Britain, nor again because instead of speaking of Britain we speak of God. Hitler speaks mostly of Germany, and not infrequently of God. No doubt he would sacrifice life itself for the Fatherland and in so doing use the language of martyrdom. Yet none can fail to sense within it all a most colossal and immature egotism. That we fail completely to perceive that not infrequently there is something of the same thing in ourselves when we talk of Britain or of God merely bears witness to the versatility of the ego in self-disguise.

It may be suggested that a genuine movement from egocentricity to theocentricity, from immature fantasy to mature and realistic faith, can only take place as the following truths are increasingly made absolutely primary in our every thought of God.

GOD AS SOVEREIGN WILL

First, God is Sovereign Will, to be served. Faith is mature in proportion as the God in whom we believe is to us first, last and all the time, King whom we obey. If our

primary thought of Him is of One who will assist and reinforce *our* powers and purposes, then no matter how altruistically these powers and purposes may be conceived and directed, we are in peril.

So stated this sounds the tritest of commonplaces. But that is precisely the point of stating it. The commonplaces lie on the surface of the mind ; deep down the old ego gets on with the job. It is in fact the hardest thing in the world never to think of God without thinking of Him primarily as One we are called to obey. It can only be achieved by a most resolute discipline of mind and will, especially in time of war when we are under such dire threat and the primary thought is to get as much help as possible from any available source, not excluding the Most High Himself.

We have observed how much, how very much, of current preaching is of the confirming and consolatory kind. This is entirely right, but everything depends on the content of the consolation offered. We are bidden rest in the thought that God reigns, but no man is entitled to rest in that thought except out of the heart of it there comes the thrusting question whether in any sense that really matters He can be said to reign in the sphere of one's own will *here and now*. The emphasis is on the *here and now*.

Perhaps the discussion which is now going on about the necessity for a radical re-ordering of the social life of this country provides an illustration. It is all to the good that such a discussion should arise, and we may indeed hope that it reveals, at any rate among Christians, a livelier sense that God's rule is consuming fire and not merely refuge and strength. Yet the hope falters somewhat when an element of procrastination enters and it is seriously suggested that, with the war on our hands, nothing can be expected of us at the moment. Not now, but after the war, we will address ourselves to these matters—if God will honour our good intentions, and answer our prayers for victory. No doubt there are appropriate times and seasons, but this calling in of to-morrow's obedience to justify a plea for to-day's indulgence is too familiar a trick of the immature mind not to evoke misgiving. We recollect how in the last war we were going

to make a land fit for heroes to live in—afterwards. It was never done. A postponed obedience is costless and argues a temper that in fact never will pay the high price of social righteousness.

GOD IS ABSOLUTE HOLINESS

Second, God is absolute holiness. This is not the same point as the one just made, though it is closely related to it.

The point now is that it is always a mark of immature faith that it can hold together the thought of God and a purely comparative morality. This is made easier by the Christian insistence on the pardoning patience of God. God—so the almost unconscious thought runs—is not a hard taskmaster. He will not deal hardly with our sins and self-indulgences provided they do not happen too often, or take too lurid, or hard, or cynical a form. We are ready to think that merely diluted vice is virtue. We trick ourselves with the fallacy that what is merely movement *in* the scale of evil and wrong is movement clean *out* of it. Of course, we do not deny that we are sinners, but we thank God, not without a sense of favours to come, that we are not as other sinners are, or even as these Germans. It is quite overlooked that of those to whom much has been given, much will be inexorably required.

One trembles for this country as one meets article after article, speech after speech, comment after comment, comparing ourselves and our record with our enemies and theirs. It is of course possible to make true statements even amongst the relativities of this evil world. Some people are better, or not so bad, as others. But the peril of discovering ourselves to be such people and of making that discovery the basis of our confidence in God is as obvious in the realm of statement as it is subtle and well-nigh unavoidable in the realm of feeling and faith.

One of the most dangerous forms which this way of thinking takes is to equate without any qualification our sacrifices and sufferings to-day with the sacrifice and suffering of the Cross. The confidence is expressed that just as upon Calvary there followed the Resurrection so upon the calvary of our bitter warfare there will and must follow the resurrection of a better world. It has even

been said that we should enter upon our grim task with the prayer, "If it be Thy will, let this cup pass from us." This is the most dangerous form of the error because it deals with sacred things, evoking the deep feelings that attach to them, and because there is within it some perception of the truth that God does use the service and self-giving of corrupt and sinful men. But it is certainly error. Thus to set alongside Calvary the very things which, though they be the best we can offer, in their exceeding sinfulness crucify Him anew, reveals an emotional simplicity of mind concerning which the best thing we can say is that it is childish and immature. A harsher judgment might call it blasphemy. To take without shrinking our comparative moralities into the very presence of the absolutely sinless One is always either blasphemy or immaturity.

GOD'S RULE UNIVERSAL

Third, God's rule is universal and impartial.

That God's love rests with absolute impartiality upon all men without any exception whatsoever, that it is impossible for Him to save A at the expense of B, that no enormity of evil-doing can take anyone outside the scope of His redeeming purpose, no Christian believer would wish in so many terms to

deny. And the use of beautiful, highly generalised phrases expressing these truths in the liturgies of public worship give him a vague sense of satisfaction, of release and breadth. A window giving on eternity is opened and some fresh air gets into the soul, narrow and stuffy with egotism and partiality. For a moment there is a glimpse of the measure of the stature of the fulness of a mature son of God. But it is only a glimpse, and for a moment. When it comes to the particularities, the clamours and agitations and crises of the personal world, it is clear how much these things still lie only on the surface of the mind, how much like children we still construe everything in terms of our own desires. And bringing mature powers of reflection to the support of immature feelings we are ready in effect to dismiss the thought of God's love resting upon, let us say, Hitler, not because of the difficulty of answering the questions which loom through the statement that God loves evil-doers (including ourselves) but because it is sentimental and weak. Like the schoolboys we dismiss it, in effect, as "sissy." So immaturity gets dubbed maturity and the spiritual fog is thicker than ever.

If this seems a harsh judgment, we can only make a last plea for maturity of judgment and beg that we should ask first, not whether it is harsh, but whether it is true.

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